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Makuxi and Wapixana

Profile

Makuxi and Wapixana groups live in the Raposa-Serra do Sul area of Roraima State, near Guyana. They hunt collectively, but tend to farm for individual consumption in a land that is extremely diverse and includes mountains and savannahs. The Makuxi and Wapixana are also known as the Uapixana, Vapidiana, Wapisiana and Wapishana. Their language is a derivation of Aruák. When couples marry they live with the wife's family, and families vary greatly in size.

Historical context

Since 1988, when cattle ranchers moved into their Raposa-Serra do Sul area, Makuxi and Wapixana have been the victims of lethal attacks by ranchers on several occasions. In 1992 it was proposed that their land be officially recognized. In 1994 continued delay in the demarcation of their lands led these groups, together with Ingarikó and Taurepang, to take direct action against illegal gold prospectors by setting up road blockades to cut off their supplies. Police destroyed their villages in retaliation. Makuxi and Ingarikó who protested against the construction of a hydroelectric dam on reserve lands were illegally removed from the proposed site.

Current issues

There is hope that, with the recognition of the Makuxi territory on 15 April 2005 by the Brazilian government as Raposa-Serra do Sol, acts of violence will end. At least 20 members of the community died defending their land rights in the 1990s.

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